

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the paragraph beginning on Page 17, line 20, as follows:

The sintering apparatus shown in the figure is a discharge plasma sintering apparatus 66, which includes a sintering chamber 67, and pressing mechanisms 68 (one of these is not shown) for pressing the stack of the mixture from both ends of the sintering chamber 67. Incidentally, the sintering apparatus may be a hot-press apparatus. The diameter of the stack (in other words, the inside diameter of the sintering chamber) is preferably 5 to 100 mm, particularly 10 to 40 mm, and the height of the stack is preferably 2 to 100 mm, particularly 5 to 20 mm. As the sintering apparatus 66, for example, a discharge plasma sintering apparatus SPS-511S produced by Sumitomo Coal Mining Co., Ltd. can be used. The pressure applied to the sintering chamber is preferably about 30 to 50 MPa. The sintering temperature is preferably about 1000 to 1600 degrees. The sintering time is preferably 10 to 30 min.

Please amend the paragraph beginning on Page 20, line 22, as follows:

Then, a binder removing step for removing the binder or binders from the laminate 88. Specifically, the laminate 88 is inserted into a binder removing furnace (not shown), and the binder or binders are removed. The binder removing step is preferably carried out by heating. The binder removing step is preferably carried out by passing the laminate 88 through the binder removing furnace. Specifically, the binder removing step is so carried out that a certain difference exists between the temperature at the time of entrance of the laminate 88 into the binder removing furnace and a maximum heating temperature in the binder removing furnace.

Namely, the temperature is lower at an inlet of the binder removing furnace, and the temperature is raised as the laminate 88 proceeds through the furnace. Incidentally, the binder removing furnace may be so set that the temperature is constant in the range from an intermediate portion to the exit side of the furnace. The temperature difference inside the binder removing furnace is preferably about 100 to 600 [[□]] degrees. With the initial temperature thus set to be lower, abrupt loss of the binder(s) can be prevented. Besides, the binder removing time (the period of time from the entrance of the laminate 88 into the binder removing furnace to the discharge of the laminate 88 from the furnace) is preferably 10 to 20 min, particularly 5 to 10 min.

Please amend the paragraph beginning on Page 21, line 20, as follows:

The sintering apparatus shown in the figure is a discharge plasma sintering apparatus 66, which includes a sintering chamber 67, and a pressing mechanism 68 for pressing the laminate of the mixture from both ends of the sintering chamber 67. Incidentally, the sintering apparatus may be a hot-press apparatus. The diameter of the laminate (in other words, the inside diameter of the sintering chamber) is preferably 5 to 100 mm, particularly 10 to 40 mm, and the height of the laminate is preferably 2 to 100 mm, particularly 5 to 20 mm. As the sintering apparatus, for example, a discharge plasma sintering apparatus SPS-511S produced by Sumitomo Coal Mining Co., Ltd. can be used. The pressure applied to the sintering chamber is preferably about 30 to 50 MPa. The sintering temperature is preferably about 1000 to 1600 [[□]] degrees. The sintering time is preferably about 10 to 30 min.